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LETTER DATED 21 JANUARY 1999 FROM THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Upon instruction from my Government I have the honour to forward herewith a government statement issued by the Office of the President on 16 January 1999, concerning the current situation in Sierra Leone (see annex).

I should be grateful if the statement could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Fode M. DABOR
Ambassador
Deputy Permanent Representative
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

Statement by the Government of Sierra Leone dated 16 January 1999

Recent developments in Sierra Leone have obliged the Government to clarify certain issues and state its position on these and the general security situation in the country.

The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) is firmly in control of Freetown and life is gradually returning to normal. It is envisaged that very soon everybody in the city will be free to go about their normal business, as essential utilities, such as electricity and telephone service, are being fully restored. Already many parts of the city have had their electricity and telephone facilities restored, while the water supply system, which was fully protected, has been undamaged. The Government acknowledges with pride the resilience which the people of Freetown have displayed during this difficult and trying period, and wishes to console them for the suffering they have endured at the hands of the callous and ruthless terrorists of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who invaded Freetown and shattered the peace and calm for which the city has been known.

The recent upsurge in rebel activities in the country came about because:

(a) The Government of Liberia intensified its support for the rebels, including the recruitment of mercenaries for them;

(b) Some of the soldiers of the defeated Sierra Leone army, who had surrendered, and whom the Government had re-engaged in the spirit of reconciliation and peace, defected to the rebels.

The commendable efforts of the Economic Community of West African States and others

Special thanks and appreciation go to the member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for their determination to defend our sovereignty and territorial integrity, our way of life and our culture, even at the expense of the ultimate sacrifice of their nationals whom they have made available for our defence. Nigeria has, as always, by far played a leadership role in the provision of troops and logistics, followed by Guinea and Ghana. It is hoped that troops from Mali will also arrive in Freetown soon. But for the timely assistance given by these countries, Sierra Leone would have been completely destroyed. The Government of Sierra Leone will remain ever grateful for the practical commitment of these countries to our cause. We will accordingly give due consideration to any advice or counsel emanating from those States with reference to any peace agreement which may emerge from the current diplomatic moves aimed at ending the crisis in Sierra Leone.

The Government notes and appreciates the political and diplomatic support given to this country by the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern

Ireland, the United States of America, China and the other permanent members of the Security Council. However, it is a mater of regret to state here that the situation in Sierra Leone is a typical illustration of the selective manner in which democracy is defended generally by the international community. In our case, the international community will advocate and urge us to practise democracy and uphold democratic principles. However, in the face of terrorism and undemocratic forces determined to wreck our democracy and its institutions, they shy away from and express reservations about providing adequate and practical assistance to defend our democracy.

The issue of dialogue with RUF

The Government wishes to set the record straight regarding dialogue with RUF aimed at achieving permanent peace in Sierra Leone. It has been the Government's position from the outset that peace through dialogue was an option preferable to a military solution of the conflict in Sierra Leone. As a result, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, within two weeks of his assumption of office, travelled to Côte d'Ivoire in April 1996 and held discussions with Corporal Foday Sankoh, leader of RUF, under the auspices of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire. This resulted in agreement on the cessation of hostilities pending further discussions to seek a permanent solution to the crisis.

That agreement was followed by a series of meetings in Abidjan which culminated in the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord in November 1996 by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and Corporal Foday Sankoh and witnessed by the President of Côte d'Ivoire, and representatives of the United Nations, OAU and the Commonwealth, all acting as moral guarantors to that Accord.

The Accord was hailed by the people of Sierra Leone as an instrument that would bring lasting peace to the country. Indeed, it contained provisions for achieving just that. In that document, the Government of Sierra Leone made a number of substantial concessions to RUF, all in the name of peace. For example, immunity was given to RUF in respect of all the atrocities committed by that organization up to the date of the signing of the Accord; RUF undertook to give up violence in the pursuit of its objectives and to convert itself into a political party pursuing the path to peace, and the Government agreed to facilitate such a process with the assistance of funds from the international community; a timescale was stipulated for the disarmament of RUF combatants under the supervision of United Nations monitors; the Government undertook to guarantee the safety of Corporal Foday Sankoh and other members of RUF on their return to Sierra Leone; the Government undertook to dispense with the services of any armed group which was then in Sierra Leone other than by way of a treaty obligation; adequate provision was made for the retraining, resettlement and reintegration of the disarmed RUF combatants. In order to consolidate the peace, the Accord provided for the establishment of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace with equal membership drawn from the Government and RUF. The Commission was to meet regularly in Freetown.

The Government discharged all of its obligations under that Accord. However, within a week after the signing, Corporal Foday Sankoh gave orders to his men to resume full-scale hostilities, explaining to them that he had signed

the Accord only to relieve himself of international pressure to do so. This fact was brought to the attention of the moral guarantors to that Accord, including Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana. He refused to cooperate with the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace.

This short account clearly belies the allegation of intransigence levied on President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah by the detractors of the Government of Sierra Leone, and supporters of the RUF cause. It illustrates the fact that Corporal Foday Sankoh did not enter the negotiations leading to the Abidjan Peace Accord in good faith, that he has no interest in peace, that he has no political agenda, and moreover, that he is not interested in peace but in causing carnage and destruction in Sierra Leone.

Over the past seven years, Corporal Foday Sankoh has fought against three Governments, including the current democratic Government of President Kabbah in Sierra Leone. He has given different reasons at different times for embarking on the armed conflict and terrorism against the people of Sierra Leone. RUF was invited to participate in the democratic elections which ushered in the current Government, but they refused to participate. Their own aim was to assume power by force of arms, through the population, and thereby negate the elections, which had been certified by observers from the United Nations, OAU, the Commonwealth, the African-American Institute and others as free and fair, and as a genuine expression of the will of the people of Sierra Leone.

In spite of the refusal of Corporal Foday Sankoh and his RUF to abide by the terms of the Abidjan Peace Accord and to pursue the path to peace, the Government has continued to make peace overtures to them, and has always been willing to enter into a dialogue with them. This remains the position and commitment of the Government.

It is worth referring here to Mozambique. There, a rebel war was fought for many years, with atrocities at a level even greater then in Sierra Leone. At the end, the parties, including the rebel leader, accepted the principle of peace. They signed a peace accord and all parties abided by its terms; peace was thereby restored to that country. The former rebel movement converted to a political party and contested the elections that followed. It secured sufficient seats to form the opposition. The verdict of the people was accepted by all the parties, and that verdict prevailed. It is important to note that no member of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (the former rebel movement) was included in the cabinet of Mozambique. What the people of Sierra Leone would wish to avoid is a situation in which opponents of their Government die under mysterious circumstances or are forced by fear for their lives to reside abroad. The people do not want to entrust their future to a leader who has caused incalculable murder, torture and terrorism, either by himself or by his hired agents.

The people of Sierra Leone are yearning for and deserve peace. Perhaps it is an answer to this desire for peace that a large number of top fighters of RUF, who invaded Freetown, have perished. The events of the past several days in Freetown have also clearly demonstrated to the unpatriotic collaborators of RUF what their lot would be in such circumstances.

The Government wishes to reinstate its offer of amnesty to all those who have been involved in this senseless destruction of lives and property. They will be pardoned and made to participate in the disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation programme as a prerequisite for their reintegration into society. Those ringleaders of RUF, about a dozen of them, who are outside Sierra Leone should remain wherever they are. They should allow us to rebuild our country. Thereafter, having made adequate apologies to the people of Sierra Leone for the crimes committed against them, they will be allowed to return home in due time.

In the case of Corporal Foday Sankoh, his appeal is still pending. Meanwhile, the Government will not allow him to reside in any other country. He will remain in Sierra Leone in full view of the authorities and the people. Otherwise, he would soon mount another reign of terror in this nation. If he renounces his ways, he can live in Sierra Leone and his security is guaranteed, but he is unreliable and cannot be trusted, as he illustrated recently after his meeting with President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in Lungi. Both he and the President discussed and agreed on a ceasefire in the presence of a senior ECOMOG officer. Both of them even recorded the agreement for broadcast. As soon as he was taken to Conakry, where he had hoped he would soon be released, he flatly denied ever agreeing to a ceasefire.

The Government has repeatedly stated that the involvement of President Charles Taylor of Liberia in Sierra Leone has been one of the most critical factors in the rebellion in Sierra Leone. The leader of RUF, Corporal Foday Sankoh, was an active member and combatant of President Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) faction during the civil war in Liberia.

In 1991, when the Government of Sierra Leone agreed to make available its territory as a base for ECOMOG peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Mr. Charles Taylor publicly stated that, because of this, he would ensure that Sierra Leoneans tasted the bitterness of the war in Liberia. Almost immediately afterwards, Taylor armed Sankoh and together with Taylor's own NPFL fighters, began to unleash carnage and destruction in our country, acts which Taylor has continued to support ever since.

Elimination of external involvement

Recent events have created a good opportunity for a quick and definitive solution of the conflict in Sierra Leone. In the first place, the whole world has now recognized, more than ever before, the role of President Taylor and other external parties in the conflict. This should now make it easier to mobilize effective international pressure to eliminate the external influence from the rebellion.

We therefore call on the international community to support ECOMOG so that it may complete its operation in Sierra Leone.